

ACCORDS AND DISCORDS

The twelfth chapter of the gospel by John brings Jesus before us in several characteristic episodes of His ministry—episodes of sorrow and episodes of joy. The former were but part of the things that He suffered in this life, He being made like unto His brethren. The latter is textually illustrated thus, "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him and cried, 'Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.' "

There is no reason to doubt that Jesus saw beyond this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Like all other temporal joys, He could see that it would not endure, not being according to the will of the Father. But, while He could see shame and crucifixion immediately ahead, by faith He could also see a similar entry into the Holy City. He would be aware of the words of David, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates: and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in"—Ps. xxiv. 7.

The Messiah was under no delusion that this entry was the fulfilment of those words. He knew the unvarying pattern, the cross before the crown. Yea, hardly had He entered the confines of the city walls on this memorable journey than He is found saying, "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name."

To Him the glorification of His Father's Holy Name was the supreme object of His life, ministry and crucifixion. He realized that, apart from this sequence of events, there could be no appreciative glorification of His Father's Name by the death-stricken sons of Adam. He stepped into the breach made by our first parents. By His obedience to His Father's will and sacrificial death He brought about the means of redemption: and by His exemplary life and exhortations He indicated to the perishing race how they might make use of that which He had been instrumental in providing. Not the least of these exhortations were those which converge on the memorial service, "This do in remembrance of me." The Father's provision, and the Son's acceptance, of the redemptive plan should surely call forth our unbounded joy. In the past we were dead in sin. Now we have hope of a participation in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem; for, while the Psalmist opens by asking, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord or who shall stand in His holy place?"—afterward the writer declares, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart: who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

*"He that walketh in darkness
Knoweth not whither he goeth."*

Truly, this is a joyous prospect, and our gathering together is in direct association with it. The bread and the wine tell us of a crucified and risen Jesus. He who was dead is now alive for evermore. He who gave His life below and now pleads His household's cause in heaven. He who shall return and lead us into the Holy City of our God. The apostle John voices the feeling that should be ours, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is"—I John iii.

Now, lest we, being called the sons of God, should begin to view ourselves approvingly and begin to measure our feeble deeds unto reward, let us call to mind the words of one who laboured more abundantly than we all. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul said, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast." John has expressed the same thought in a little different language, but just as effectively, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He, then, follows up with the logical exhortation, "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*"

This last thought, then, should be the basis of our conduct toward one another. It should be the basis of those works which evidence a lively faith in the Word of God. Without it we are "become as sounding brass, mere noisy flesh, or a tinkling cymbal. The original Greek for "tinkling" in this place is *alalazo*, and, contrary to our understanding of the word tinkle, "a slight metallic melodic sound"; its root meanings are "to clash, clank, cry aloud," giving us the impression of harshness, braggadocio—the opposite of that which is gentle and easy to be entreated.

This is a reversal of nature that is not accomplished in twenty-four hours, but surely by this time some of us should be evidencing the impression of the Spirit's influence.

One of the first lessons we should learn in this regeneration of our minds is brought out in the opening eight verses of John xii. It is the incident of the anointing of Jesus for his burial. Mary had used very costly ointment of spikenard and Judas Iscariot had complained of the waste. "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Superficially, it sounded like a very fair question: but, like many other questions, it was out of place at the time. For one thing it was unnecessarily critical, for had he taken the proper procedure he would have learnt the true intents of Mary's heart. Hence, Jesus rightly rebuked Judas for prying so conspicuously into matters that were of no concern to him. "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you: but Me have ye not always."

The main lesson here for brethren and sisters of Christ is that referred to by Solomon, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to rend, and a time to sew." But man is ever choosing the wrong time to do this or that. Hence, Solomon continues, "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it." But, he further concludes, "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" —Eccl. iii.

We note that what Mary had done filled the house with the odour of the ointment. Not only was Jesus anointed for His burial but we are hereby informed that the good work had a pleasant and beneficial effect upon all in the house: that is, upon all but one. The effect of Judas' churlish and selfish attitude might well have resulted in the same sorry spectacle exhibited in the parable of the Prodigal Son if the Lord Jesus had not intervened. Similarly, in the Household of the Faith, the honest and sincere effort or suggestion of a brother or sister along a scriptural line may be welcomed with general pleasure as a further step for taking hold of the Lord's service and agreed to be for the betterment of all. But should some detect a small flaw in it and brand the whole matter as unscriptural and ill and hastily conceived, and say so, the effect is as distressing as the self-righteous elder brother's refusal to go into the house of joy because things did not turn out in the manner that he thought proper.

It is well to remember in relation to these things also that we are hardly in a position in these days, when we lack the Holy Spirit, to rightly evaluate every thing that is done or said by one or another of our brethren and sisters. In some things that we raise our voice against we might actually be found to be striving against the will of our Heavenly Father. When, and if, this is discovered it is the course of true wisdom to put aside the personal disappointments that sometimes come when our opinion or counsel is frustrated. In place of resentment we will lend our energies and talents in the direction indicated, providing, of course, that it is not a violation of the laws of Christ.

And now we change our trend of thought as we turn to verses 12 to 19.

Here is pictured a scene of belief, by the multitude, in the works of the Messiah, but such is not to be viewed alone. Our knowledge of what afterwards transpired gives us the exhortation in this matter. It is the case of the good seed of the Word falling on stony ground. The people rejoiced in the miracles Jesus performed and would fain have made Him king: but when it was evident that He still had much work to do many turned aside, especially when it was perceived that He did not agree with the Scribes and Sadducees and Pharisees, and that if they agreed with Him they would be in jeopardy of being cast out of the synagogue.

Surely we can perceive that they were the same class that came again and again for the loaves and the fishes. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves to see that we do not use the Truth only as a means to temporal advantage. A long acquaintance with the Household places some in positions of prominence in the Ecclesia or the Ecclesial World, and still others may indirectly be brought into quite favourable temporal positions. In both instances the danger to our spiritual welfare is correspondingly increased due to the lust of the eye and the pride of life; and so it is that we must continually exhort one another lest, when temptation or Divinely ordained trial comes along, we fall from the narrow way. It was not without reason that our Lord said, "Many that are first shall be last."

The most distressing part of such calamities is that they usually enfold a number of brethren and sisters and before love can intervene the whole household is distraught, and those who aforesaid called one another brother and sister use terms that are certainly not becoming to saints. It is a sinister warning that Christ gives to those who so trouble the body; to those who disturb the little or the weak ones. "It were better that a millstone were tied about his neck and he himself cast into the sea."

The forty-second and forty-third verses of the same chapter convey a somewhat similar thought, and thereby we are given an opportunity to expand our previous thoughts. "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

We, being of the same Adamic race, are also prone to fall to the same temptations. There is no guarantee either, because we live in an age when the name of Christ is applied as a general term (Christendom) to the continents of Europe, Australia and North and South America, that we are free from like trials. To this many of us can attest; some of us when we left other places of worship; and some of us in our frequent contacts with the believers in immortal-soulism, heaven going, and such like heresies. These, however, we anticipated when we put on the sin-covering Name of the Saviour, for "He told us no less." If the world cannot accept the words of the Master, how can they enjoy the company of his disciples? Hence He comfortingly said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward (which is reserved) in heaven."

In harmony with the foregoing, when we are so buffeted by the world we usually do bear it and look to the scriptures for encouragement. But how much more difficult it is when a brother or a sister does the same. For some almost unfathomable reason anger quickly kindles our soul. We forget that whereunto we are called, and that which has been done for us by our Master and by our companions in the past. In this we all need exhortation, and we shall only slowly improve. Let us hearken to the words of James though, "Let not the sun go down on thy wrath." If we bear this in mind, our evening prayer will ask our Heavenly Father's forgiveness, and we will not be long in seeking our brother's pardon too.

It is because ecclesial history has constantly exhibited the unhappy pattern of fraternal discord that we exhort one another along such lines—that we exhort one another as David said, "to put not our trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help." But, despite this goodly scriptural counsel, brethren continue to err. Instead of going to the Word of God, and instead of giving oneself over to meditation on the same, the natural tendency has been to jump to a hasty conclusion, or perhaps wait to see how other brethren feel about the matter. Let us, at such a time, recall the exhortation of Paul to Timothy. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Why then should we look to frail man for guidance? "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you."

But it may be that we are confronted with problems that do not yield to any one particular scriptural delineation. What should be our attitude then? To our mind the words of Bro. Roberts, in an exhortation in "Seasons of Comfort," supplies the answer: —

"The remedy lies in believing the testimonies on both sides of the subject . . . embarrassment is created by insistence on a view derived from one phase of the subject only, to the exclusion of another equally important in its place, and with which it is not inconsistent, though apparently so."

In another place he has said: —

"Many 'questions' may be scriptural questions in the sense of relating to matters spoken of in the scriptures and may yet be entirely unprofitable or vain, as matters of discourse or contention. Which questions are of this character and which are not, may be settled by the test of fruitfulness: are they or are they not of a character to incline the mind to obedience and the love of God? Do they or do they not affect comfort, hope, faith, mercy and righteousness? Have they or have they not any tendency to influence our attitude towards the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? As a rule, it will not be difficult to answer these questions, and by the answer a wise man's action will abide."

It is in this connection then that the exhortations of the beloved John come before true believers in these days of increasing ecclesial darkness. These days of which it was asked, "When Christ comes shall he find the faith in the earth?" Let us heed the lesson of the forty-second and forty-third verses. Let us not fear to be cast out for well doing, let us not seek the word of praise of men. Let us rather prayerfully apply ourselves to the Word of God. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Let us counsel one another in a brotherly spirit, and abide by that which is right and just.

At the outset of these words we spoke of the glorious prospect of Jesus' and the Saints' joyful entry into the Holy City. Our remarks since then have necessarily turned to our present warfare, by way of exhortation, but the two are very closely linked. This is seen in Psalm xxiv, where David asks, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His Holy Place?" and the rejoinder follows, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart: who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." It is good, scriptural policy, then, that we should continue to exhort one another and beseech one another to refrain from foolish and sinful things, and so much the more as we see that great day approaching.

It is the part of wisdom that we heed the words of Jesus, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Work while ye have the light lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

To-day, light is yet with us. Let us gird up our loins and renew our determination to merit the Master's approval. Let us not bury our talents whether they be few or many. Instead, let us give our lives for one another, even as He whose sacrifice we commemorate has given His.

A worthy partaking of the emblems will always cause us to reflect. We will see the shame and the glory. We will see the love of the Father and the love of the Son. We will see the earth steeped in wickedness and we will see the glories of the Kingdom, the establishment of which is heralded in the well-known words, "Who is the King of Glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads ye gates: and the King of Glory shall come in." Let us righteously strive to be there.

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